

THE LINCOLN LIFE STORY

The World's Greatest Democrat---A Nation Honors Itself by Humbly Trying to Honor His Memory

By RICHARD LLOYD JONES



WEINMAN STATUE OF LINCOLN

AT a time when warships parade the seas to belch forth huge clouds of black intimidating smoke for covetous nations to witness: at a time when the spiritual welfare of a people has been lost in a vicious struggle of conquest for fertile fields, virgin forests, and exhaustless mines: at a time when the youths of a proud and spirited nation are so enamoured of their material plenty that they have become drunk with the dissipations of prosperity; at a time when the favor of suffrage is acquired more easily through the generous display of flags and bunting, the bill-posting of portraits of self-seeking candidates, and the irrational dispensation of gold, than through the exposition of argument and the calm reflection of reason;—then does it become supremely wise for a people to pause and contemplate from whence did they come and whither do they go?

The history of humanity is one long story of conquest for gain. Into this struggle, from time to time, there has come the ameliorating influence of a strong and sweetened spirit that has shown mankind a better path to follow. In the romance of nations, a people's progress and betterment have been recorded wherever such a benignant influence has spread. And, in the ultimate end, these same peoples have fastened defeat upon their destiny whenever they have surely fixed upon their heads this crown of greed and conquest.

TO escape the stagnating classes and castes that for ages have imprisoned Asia's progress, and to emancipate a people from the hereditary complications of Europe's oligarchies and aristocracies, a new nation was conceived a century and a third ago on a new and unfettered continent. Here a government was established which assured all mankind that under its flag opportunity knew no prejudice or favor and in the letter of its laws all men were equal. They who made this government are immortal.

But even here, the inherent instinct of ancient ancestors fastened itself upon the very people who professed the most passionate love for the word *Liberty*. With commendable piety, they practised the preaching of the eighth Commandment, in so far as it applied to the products of labor, but with genuine Yankee

ingenuity they found Scriptural justification for the practice of stealing labor itself. Here again, the crown of selfishness was fastening down. The stories of other nations were not recounted or were little heeded. So the government which Philadelphia's Independence Bell proclaimed, should be torn asunder before the cherished institution of a special privilege should be set aside. Defiant politicians made a war. The struggle came. And out of that struggle rose the noblest, the gentlest, and the sincerest statesman the world has ever known. His name was Abraham Lincoln. He came from the bare clay of the borderland of that struggle. So humble was his first rude little home that gave him shelter, men marvelled at his growth in power.

Upon the great seal of his mother state was inscribed the legend: "United we stand, divided we fall,"—a prophetic declaration of the task her greatest son came into the world to do. He never recognized an enemy, for, like the lowly Nazarene, he never had one. Others might hate but he could not. His love, his tenderness, his simplicity and directness became as contagious as his wisdom and his honesty. For four awful years he was President of a divided country, but never of a fragment of a country. The South was his country and her people his people, and he loved them. He was the gentlest conqueror that ever entered a fallen capital. Those who opposed his battle lines, nearly half a century ago, acknowledge with gratitude today his service in bringing to them a rich civic victory through a military defeat, and even when the infamous act of a madman had closed his eyes and laid his hands at rest, both Jefferson Davis and General Lee sorrowfully declared that the South had lost her truest friend. The thirteen bars are all on the flag of Washington and forty-five stars are in its field of blue because Lincoln lived. Today a nation honors itself by humbly trying to honor his memory.

SINCE man first recorded the achievements of men, no life has ever been lived which so many have tried to interpret and recount. A significant fact in itself. Search the reason for this, if you will,—there is but one answer. His life was one long battle against the stubbornness of adversity;—but the fight against adversity is the most familiar story known to the reader of American biography. He was deeply sensible to the sufferings and sorrows of men,—but the world is full of stories of those who have borne for others. His humor was gentle and penetrating, but this cannot be the answer. His honesty became a national proverb, but even this was not the cause. He was the saviour of a race, but even this does not explain the publication of more than a thousand copyrighted biographies of a man who lived forty-four years ago. He is the hero of civilization. Yes; and why? Because he was the world's greatest Democrat; in him Democracy flowered.

Kentucky claims him as her son. Indiana claims him as her youth. Illinois claims him as her citizen. Every state claims him as a common countryman and every nation claims him as a *man*. All parties enroll him. Our statesmen profess to be his disciples. Cunning politicians court favor by toying with his name. His rhetoric is the model of the English language. His epigrams of wisdom are the equal of the Scriptures before courts and in parliamentary chambers. Down in Kentucky the people of the nation are now erecting a stately and strong granite building to shield and protect the humble log home from whence he came. One of the most interesting and vitalizing facts in Lincoln's life is that he was not born on a boulevard or in a Waldorf Astoria. Has the humble home no lesson to carry to succeeding generations? As we develop our untold resources of natural riches, satiate our uncurbed appetites and grow perhaps arrogant in our affluence, let us look upon this worn little cabin and not forget that democracy is ever humble. Let it ever remind us that an ideal is better than a mine; that a helping hand is better than a clutching fist; that an encouraging word outweighs a command. Who can look upon that weather-worn pile of logs, or upon his bronzen image and be a coward? Who can look upon these and not be brave.

I N our peace, prosperity, and abundant affluence, have we no new responsibilities which, by the plans of an Infinite Providence we are called upon to bear? Let us remind ourselves of Lincoln's time, when men's cheeks blushed for the sorrows and sufferings of men, and ask ourselves are we, and through us our statesmen, meeting Lincoln obligations today? Have we a Thaddeus Stevens? Has Illinois an Elihu Washburne or an Owen Lovejoy? Has California a Starr King? Has Kentucky a Henry or a Cassius Clay? Has Pennsylvania a Joshua Giddings? New York, a Seward, a Curtis, or a John Brown? Has Massachusetts a Sumner? or Virginia a Lee?

We think of Washington with gratitude, admiration, and pride; of Jefferson and Madison with intellectual reverence,

and of their homes as national shrines; we think of Jackson and Grant and Lee with gratitude for their strength and fortitude. But the memory of Lincoln stirs the nation's tenderest sentiments of love, thrills every human heart with a sweet sense of nearness and kinship. It is not a political or a patriotic enthusiasm, but a peculiarly deep personal heartfelt sentiment that is without parallel in the story of the world. With so rich and priceless a heritage, let us cherish the democracy which he both inspired and conserved. May we never wear his memory with that dull blind instinct that prompts a youth to hold to his talisman hung around his neck by hands he knows not whose,—but rather let us cherish Lincoln's memory by living Lincoln lives.